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ABSTRACT

This paper describes how Central Missouri State University converted to block scheduling to provide higher quality field experiences for education majors. The university changed its 50-minute Monday/Wednesday/Friday classes to 75-minute Monday/Friday and Tuesday/Thursday classes, with Wednesdays off for field experiences. This paper explains the process of developing the new schedule, which involved: informal discussion within the department; preliminary discussion with the dean, provost, and other deans; department approval; securing the support of academic departments; schedule building with individual departments; and advising and enrolling students. The transition to the 4-day schedule was very smooth. Advantages included having an easier time getting students into the field on Wednesdays and providing supervising faculty with a day for field visits. Disadvantages included lack of participation by the secondary program. Students and faculty have reacted favorably to the new schedule. Though extensive planning and good communication were necessary to ensure successful implementation, the resulting advantages were worth the effort. (SM)

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The Enhancement of Student Learning Through the Implementation of a Four-Day Block Scheduling

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Rationale

The push for more frequent and higher quality field experiences for education majors, coupled with increasing demands for scholarship and service for faculty resulted in Central Missouri State University reexamining how time is being used for coursework. Further, Central's expanding partnerships with public schools through professional development schools and now charter schools made judicious use of time even more critical.

In spring, 1998, serious discussion began on the possibility of converting to block scheduling. Transition to a new schedule would eliminate the fifty-minute Monday-Wednesday-Friday classes (assuming a three-hour course), and use the same seventy-five minute schedule that is currently followed on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The original proposal suggested M-W, T-Th classes, with Fridays off for field experience. Consideration of that plan was quickly changed when administrators began thinking about how the public would perceive Central moving to a three-day weekend! The 'blocked-out' Wednesday plan (see attached) piloted fall, 1999 is actually better, since there is less interference in coordinating field experiences with the public schools' calendars, which typically schedule Mondays or Fridays off for parent conferences or inservices.

It was anticipated that there would be several advantages to block scheduling. The one the author of the proposal considered most important was increasing the length of the class period. Just as block scheduling is implemented in middle and high schools to provide flexibility for instructional strategies, and to promote more in-depth exploration of topics and thinking, it was thought that perhaps adults should also be using this format. Having Wednesdays blocked out also serves the needs of Central's many non-traditional students. Because not every student has field experience every semester, or the required field experience may be integrated into class

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time, class-free Wednesdays means 20% less commuting, fewer child-care expenses, or possibly an extra day each week available for work. Having a designated day for field experience also is helpful to faculty who are teaching courses and supervising student teachers or field experience students. Other possible uses discussed included Wednesdays serving as an Evaluation day – especially in light of student portfolios and peer/faculty assessment committees. This would provide built-in times that committees could meet for evaluation purposes. Another consideration would be the possibility of offering 'modular' courses that would allow students to pick up additional hours during the semester. Possible combinations might be 3 five-week sessions, 2 eight-week sessions, 1 sixteen-week session (like a night class, only during the day), 3 all-day sessions (weekend college model with one day, 7 hours, or a combination of sessions. Finally, the department considered using Wednesdays as a faculty development day that could be used for meetings, planning, or professional writing. It was decided to maintain the same schedule for department meetings that C & I has adhered to in the past (Mondays and Fridays, 11:00 a.m. – noon) in order to keep Wednesdays open.

Process of Developing Approval for the MTRF Schedule

The fifteen other departments at Central engaged in teacher education teach many of the courses needing to be included in the schedule redesign. This reality meant that the provost and deans of the four colleges had to be convinced of its benefits, especially the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. It was also very important for departments in the College of Education and Human Services to be fully on board. And, of course, it was crucial that the Curriculum and Instruction Department be fully committed to this schedule.

The process for securing approval from all stakeholders for this major schedule redesign moved through the following stages, although not always in linear fashion or in isolation from the other stages.

Stage One: Informal Discussion within the Department – 1997-1998

The first stage was informal discussion within the department. These discussions often focused on the need as well as preliminary ideas regarding how we might conceptualize the redesign. These discussions lasted for a period of over one-year.

Stage Two: Preliminary Discussion with the Dean, Provost, and other Deans - Summer, 1998.

Sensing emerging support within the department, the dean was approached with the idea. He embraced the concept immediately. His only concern was that the one day left open be a day, which would be fully available for field experiences. He then began the process of consulting the provost and other deans. The idea made sense to all parties.

Stage Three: Department Approval - September, 1998.

While the dean was exploring support among other central administrators, the Department of Curriculum and Instruction began formal discussion of the concept. This stage focused on an actual printed draft of the schedule. The department voted unanimously after two department meetings to go forward with this schedule change. Schedule mock-ups were distributed to Curriculum and Instruction faculty at a department meeting, and members were asked to fill it out with their ideal days and times for the courses they taught. Using the information about faculty preferences, a working schedule was constructed, making sure that courses required in given semesters didn't conflict, sections were offered at varying times during the day, and that C&I courses weren't scheduled at the same time as necessary courses outside of the department. An analysis was also done to find out the maximum number of hours a student could take with implementation of the four-day schedule. It was determined that if a student wanted to attend classes between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. MTRF, (and given that the student could get into each class) over 30 hours/semester could be picked up.

Stage Four: Securing Support of Academic Departments – Early October, 1998.

After the department was fully supportive, the process of securing support from other departments began. The concept was introduced at an Academic Council meeting of all academic administrators on campus. A meeting was subsequently held with all department chairs with education programs on campus. During this meeting, the department chairs gave their nod of approval for the schedule change for early childhood, elementary, and middle school programs, but not for the secondary program.

Stage Five: Schedule Building with Individual Departments – October and November, 1998.

With buy-in from all stakeholders to take the schedule design forward for the early childhood, elementary, and middle school schedule programs, the actual process of working with individual departments to make schedule modifications for 1999-2000 began. For this process, the departments to be contacted were listed and computer printouts overlaying their departments' course offerings on the new schedule format were prepared. Then individual conferences with each department chair were held. Departments were given data to help them determine how many sections needed to be offered on the MTRF schedule to accommodate the projected enrollments. Departments responded favorably, making many helpful schedule adjustments. Those faculty members who do the most advising of early childhood, elementary and middle school majors were asked frequently to monitor the schedule's development, as they knew where scheduling conflicts might arise for their majors. Along with the other work being done at this time, availability of classrooms for Monday/Friday classes was also ensured, as it was anticipated that space might become an issue when C&I courses were changed. As it turned out, only one additional classroom (outside of the department's usual allotment) was needed.

Stage Six: Advising and Enrolling Students – November, 1998 through April, 1999

As soon as it was clear that the schedule would be implemented for the 1999-2000 school year, the department began the process of alerting students to expect the change. This early notification occurred in November and December in class settings.

The department made sure that the central academic advisors were fully informed about the upcoming schedule change, so they could provide accurate and useful assistance to students. Department faculty also began explaining to students in fall classes the purposes and general format of the revised schedule.

Since students were scheduled to begin enrolling for the fall semester in early March, the department's advisors intensified the dissemination of information. A special feature of these efforts included two late-afternoon informational sessions for all early childhood, elementary, and middle school majors. The department's lead advisor also made sure that all students in the

introductory major course for majors were oriented to the new schedule in both fall and spring semesters.

The transition to a four-day schedule has been remarkably smooth. Probably because a lot of groundwork was laid ahead of time by informing Central's academic advisors, faculty and students, and working with other departments across campus to minimize scheduling conflict.

Advantages

The expected benefits of having an easier time getting students into the field on Wednesdays and providing supervising faculty with a day for field visits are occurring. Many faculty also feel the change supports the research on learning and effective delivery of instruction for their classes. Additionally, since students are not taking department courses on Wednesdays, an unanticipated side effect has been fewer interruptions for student advisement. The time has also allowed the department to have a whole-day retreat for the entire faculty without having to worry about missing classes.

Disadvantages

Central does not have the secondary program participating in the four-day schedule. It will take massive cooperation and coordination with all colleges across campus for this to happen.

Conclusion

Students and faculty have reacted favorably to the new schedule. A goal is to bring in the secondary program components so that secondary education majors are able to have blocks of time free for field experience, just as the other education majors do. Other departments across campus have expressed interest in learning more about the schedule. Also, initiatives such as service learning and the trend of disciplines offering more internships and externships may also drive a change in scheduling. Ideally, the campus as a whole would move to a four-day schedule.

Extensive planning and good communication at every step of the process is certainly necessary to ensure successful implementation. However the resulting advantages for students and faculty far outweigh the amount of time and effort put into designing the new schedule.

Central Missouri State University
Dept. of Curriculum Instruction
Fall 1999 Block Scheduling

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
8:00-9:15	ScED 1110 Sec 5 - Puckett	ScED 1110 Lab 6 - Puckett		ScED 1110 Lab 6 - Puckett	ScED 1110 Sec 5 - Puckett
	EdCI 2310 Sec 10 - Hofmeister	EdCI 2310 Sec 8 - Hofmeister		EdCI 2310 Sec 8 - Hofmeister	EdCI 2310 Sec 1 - Hofmeister
	EdCI 4300 Sec 3 - Williams	EdCI 4210 Sec 5 -		EdCI 4210 Sec 5 -	EdCI 4300 Sec 3 - Williams
		EdCI 4220 Sec 2 - Carr		EdCI 4220 Sec 2 - Carr	
		EdCI 4220 Sec 3 - Mihalevich		EdCI 4220 Sec 3 - Mihalevich	
		EdCI 4340 Sec 2 - Snyder		EdCI 4340 Sec 2 - Snyder	
		EdCI 4830 Sec 3 - Pattnaik		EdCI 4830 Sec 3 - Pattnaik	
		EdCI 4710 Sec 2		EdCI 4710 Sec 2	
9:30-10:45	EdCI 2100 Sec 6 - Zelazek (1st 1/2)	ScED 1110 Lab 8 -Puckett		ScED 1110 Lab 8 -Puckett	EdCI 2100 Sec 6 - Zelazek (1st 1/2)
	EdCI 2100 Sec 7 - Garten (1st 1/2)	EdCI 2100 Sec 10 - Zelazek (1st 1/2)		EdCI 2100 Sec 10 - Zelazek (1st 1/2)	EdCI 2100 Sec 7 - Garten (1st 1/2)
	EdCI 2101 Sec 1 - Lamson (2nd 1/2)	EdCI 2310 Sec 7 - Hofmeister		EdCI 2310 Sec 7 - Hofmeister	EdCI 2101 Sec 1 - Lamson (2nd 1/2)
	EdCI 2110 Sec 2 - Almarza	EdCI 3210 Sec 5 -		EdCI 3210 Sec 5 -	EdCI 2110 Sec 2 - Almarza
	EdCI 2310 Sec 11 - Smith	EdCI 3220 Sec 1 - Wright		EdCI 3220 Sec 1 - Wright	EdCI 2310 Sec 11 - Smith
	EdCI 3210 Sec 4 - Mihalevich	EdCI 3410 Sec 8 - Buchanan		EdCI 3410 Sec 8 - Buchanan	EdCI 3210 Sec 4 - Mihalevich
	EdCI 3410 Sec 5 - Buchanan	EdCI 3420 Sec 1 - Almarza		EdCI 3420 Sec 1 - Almarza	EdCI 3410 Sec 5 - Buchanan
	EdCI 4210 Sec 4 - Manzo	EdCI 3420 Sec 3 - Gilbert		EdCI 3420 Sec 3 - Gilbert	EdCI 4210 Sec 4 - Manzo
	EdCI 4215 Sec 2 - Vacek	EdCI 3500 Sec 2 - Belcher		EdCI 3500 Sec 2 - Belcher	EdCI 4215 Sec 2 - Vacek
	EdCI 4300 Sec 1 - Williams	EdCI 4215 Sec 2 -		EdCI 4215 Sec 2 -	EdCI 4300 Sec 1 - Williams
	EdCI 4740 Sec 1	EdCI 4250 Sec 2 - Carr			EdCI 4740 Sec 1
	ScED 1110 Sec 7 -Puckett	EdCI 4250 Sec 3 - Mihalevich			ScED 1110 Sec 7 -Puckett
11:00-12:15		EdCI 2310 Sec 5 - Hofmeister		EdCI 2310 Sec 5 - Hofmeister	
		EdCI 2830 Sec 1 - Pattnaik		EdCI 2830 Sec 1 - Pattnaik	
		EdCI 3210 Sec 6 -		EdCI 3210 Sec 6	
		EdCI 4400 Sec 5 - Lamson		EdCI 4400 Sec 5 - Lamson	
		EdCI 4400 Sec 4 - Snyder		EdCI 4400 Sec 4 - Snyder	
		EdCI 4790 Sec 1		EdCI 4790 Sec 1	
12:30-1:45	ScED 1120 Sec 7 -	ScED 1120 Sec 2		ScED 1120 Sec 2	ScED 1120 Sec 7 -
	EdCI 2100 Sec 11 - Huber (1st 1/2)	Integrated Block		Integrated Block	EdCI 2100 Sec 11 - Huber (1st 1/2)
	EdCI 2100 Sec 12- Snyder (1st 1/2)	EdCI 4220 Sec 1 - Manzo		EdCI 4220 Sec 1 - Manzo	EdCI 2100 Sec 12- Snyder (1st 1/2)
	EdCI 2101 Sec 1 - Lamson (2nd 1/2)	EdCI 4220 Sec 4		EdCI 4220 Sec 4	EdCI 2101 Sec 1 - Lamson (2nd 1/2)
	EdCI 2110 Sec 1 - Pattnaik	EdCI 4730 Sec 2		EdCI 4730 Sec 2	EdCI 2110 Sec 1 - Pattnaik
	Integrated Block				Integrated Block
	EdCI 3500 Sec 3 - Belcher				EdCI 3500 Sec 3 - Belcher
	ScED 4120 Sec 7 -				ScED 4120 Sec 7 -
	EdCI 4300 Sec 4 - Williams				EdCI 4300 Sec 4 - Williams
	EdCI Sec 2 -				EdCI Sec 2 -
2:00-3:15	EdCI 2850 Sec 2 - Pattnaik	EdCI 2310 Sec 9 - Hofmeister		EdCI 2310 Sec 9 - Hofmeister	EdCI 2850 Sec 2 - Pattnaik
	Integrated Block	Integrated Block		Integrated Block	Integrated Block
	EdCI 4210 Sec 6 - Manzo	EdCI 4250 Sec 4 -		EdCI 4250 Sec 1 - Manzo	EdCI 4120 Sec 6 - Manzo
	EdCI 4300 Sec 2 - Williams	EdCI 4400 Sec 7 - Lamson		EdCI 4250 Sec 2 - Mihalevich	EdCI 4300 Sec 2 - Williams
	EdCI 4770 Sec 1	EdCI 4784 Sec 1		EdCI 4400 Sec 3 - Lamson	
3:30-4:45	ScED 1120 Sec 3 -	ScED 1120 Sec 4 -		ScED 1120 Sec 4 -	ScED 1120 Sec 3 -
	Integrated Block	Integrated Block		Integrated Block	Integrated Block
		EdCI 3420 Sec 2 - Gilbert		EdCI 3420 Sec 2 - Gilbert	
4:00-5:50	ScED 1120 Sec 9	ScED 1120 Lab 10 7			
	EdCI 2150				
5:00-6:10		EdCI 4312 Sec 2 - Hofmeister			
5:00-6:50		EdCI 5240 Sec 1 - Mihalevich		ScED 1120 Lab 12 -	
		ScED 1120 Sec 11 -			
6:00-7:50		EdCI 2310 Sec 12 - Smith		EdCI 5340 Sec 1 - Peter	
6:00-8:30				EdCI 3210 Sec 8 -	
6:00-8:45	EdCI 4215 Sec 3 - Vacek	EdCI 4830 Sec 4 - Hunt	EdCI 3220 Sec 4 - Vacek	EdCI 3210 Sec 7 -	
	EdCI 4774 Sec 1 - Sylvester		EdCI 3500 Sec 1 - Belcher	EdCI 5205 Sec 1 - Carr	
	EdCI 4850 Sec 2 - Lamson		EdCI 4215 Sec 4		
			EdCI 4774 Sec 1 - Sylvester		
			EdCI 5900 Sec 4 - Williams		
6:00-8:55	EdCI 5900 Sec 3 - Williams	EdCI 5340 Sec 2 - Peter	EdCI 4320 Sec 1 - Snyder		
	EdCI 5320 Sec 1 - Wright				
6:00-9:00	EdCI 5350 Sec 2 - Gilbert				
8:00-9:50		EdCI 5130 Sec 1 - Hofmeister			

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